

REMARKS

Claims 45-54 are pending. Claims 45, 48, and 50-54 have been amended in this response. Support for these amendments can be found, *inter alia*, at page 7, lines 1 thru 30 of the original application. Claim 49 has been canceled, and no new claims have been added. Claims 45-48 and 50-54 therefore will be pending upon entry of the above amendments.

The drawings have been objected to as failing to depict converging sidewalls as recited in the claim 54. Claim 54 has been amended in this response to recite "converging walls" in lieu of "converging sidewalls." As converging walls are depicted in the drawings, the objection to the drawings has been addressed by the noted claim amendment.

Claims 45-54 have been objected to because the Examiner considers the claim term "contact section" to be so broadly defined that it is not clear what defines the contact section. Applicant respectfully disagrees. For example, independent claim 45 expressly states that the contact section includes the following structure: a bottom wall; a first set of sidewalls that define a first closed tubular portion with the bottom wall; and a second set of sidewalls that define a second closed tubular portion with the bottom wall. Independent claims 48, 52, and 54 likewise recite specific structure for the contact section.

Claims 45-54 have also been objected to because the Examiner considers the claim term "tubular portion" to be so broadly defined that it does not have to be a closed tubular portion. Applicant respectfully submits that one of ordinary skill in the art of connector design would recognize the term "tubular" as defining a closed structure. In the interest of advancing prosecution of the application, however, the claims have been amended to recite a "closed tubular portion." Applicant respectfully submits that this clarifying amendment does not narrow the scope of the amended claims.

Claims 45-54 have also been objected to because the Examiner considers the claim language "a flexible contact element at least partially disposed within the contact section in a non-fixedly secured manner" to be vague and indefinite because it is not clear how the contact element is not fixed to the contact section. The noted claim language has been deleted from independent claims 48 and 52, thus rendering this objection moot with respect to claims 48, 52, and dependent claims 50, 51, and 53.

Independent claims 45 and 54 have been amended to more clearly define the relationship between the contact section and the flexible contact element. In particular, claims 45 and 54 have been amended to recite a flexible contact element at least partially disposed within the contact section and retained by the contact section so that opposing ends of the flexible contact element can move in relation to the contact section. Applicant respectfully submits that this clarifying amendment does not narrow the scope of the amended claims.

Claim 54 has been objected to because the Examiner considers the claim term “converging sidewalls” confusing, as the application discloses converging horizontal walls. Claim 54 has been amended to recite “walls” in lieu of “sidewalls.” Applicant respectfully submits that this clarifying amendment does not narrow the scope of claim 54.

Claims 45-54 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. In particular, the Examiner asserts that the claim language “so that opposing ends of the flexible contact element are free, for urging a complementary male terminal into engagement with the bottom wall” is vague and indefinite because the opposing ends cannot urge a complementary male terminal. Claim 49 has been canceled, thereby rendering this rejection moot with respect to that claim.

The language “so that opposing ends of the flexible contact element are free” has been deleted from independent claims 48 and 52. With regard to independent claims 45 and 54, Applicant respectfully notes that the language “for urging a complementary male terminal into engagement with the bottom wall” is preceded by a comma. The noted language thus refers to the flexible contact element, and not necessarily to the opposing ends thereof. Moreover, the application specification states that the flexible contact element urges the complementary male terminal into engagement with the bottom wall. Original application at pg. 6, lines 7-9.

In the interest of advancing prosecution of the application, however, claims 45 and 54 have been amended to recite the flexible contact element for urging a complementary male terminal into engagement with the bottom wall. Applicant respectfully submits that this clarifying amendment does not narrow the scope of the amended claims. Withdrawal of the rejection of claims 45-48 and 50-54 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, is respectfully requested.

Claims 45-54 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. patent no. 4,880,401 (Shima). Claim 49 has been canceled, thereby rendering this rejection moot with respect to that claim.

Amended claim 45 of the present application recites, *inter alia*, a contact section including a bottom wall; a first set of walls that define a first closed tubular portion with the bottom wall; and a second set of walls that define a second closed tubular portion with the bottom wall; and a flexible contact element at least partially disposed within the contact section, wherein the flexible contact element does not extend into the first closed tubular portion. These features can help protect the flexible contact element when the female electrical terminal is mated with a complementary male terminal, by reducing the potential for contact between the leading edge of the flexible contact element and the complementary male terminal. *See* page 6, line 22 thru page 7, line 30 of the original application.

The main body (14) of the connector piece (12) of Shima has a C-shaped cross section. Shima spec. at col. 3, lines 32, 33; Figures 3 and 4 of Shima. Thus, the main body (14) is open, rather than closed. Moreover, the connector piece (12) does not include any features that reduce the potential for contact between the leading edge of the contact piece (15) and the male electric connector piece (M) as the male electric connector piece is inserted into the contact piece.

Applicant therefore respectfully submits that Shima neither teaches nor suggests a contact section including a bottom wall, a first set of walls that define a first closed tubular portion with the bottom wall, and a second set of walls that define a second closed tubular portion with the bottom wall; and a flexible contact element at least partially disposed within the contact section, wherein the flexible contact element does not extend into the first closed tubular portion. Withdrawal of the rejection of claim 45 (and claims 46 and 47, which depend therefrom) under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) is respectfully requested.

Amended claim 48 recites, *inter alia*, a contact section including a first closed tubular portion that forms an insertion pathway for a complementary male terminal; and a second closed tubular portion being arranged end to end with the first closed tubular portion; wherein geometrically central axes of the first and second closed tubular portions are misaligned such that a space is formed outside of the insertion pathway; and a flexible contact element including a leading edge that is positioned within the space.

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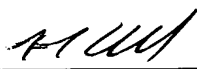
Amended claim 52 recites, *inter alia*, a contact section including a first closed tubular portion that forms an insertion pathway for a complementary male contact; and a second closed tubular portion being arranged end to end with the first closed tubular portion; wherein the first closed tubular portion has an effective diameter that is a different size than that of the second closed tubular portion such that a space is formed outside of the insertion pathway; and a flexible contact element including a leading edge that is positioned within the space.

Amended claim 54 recites, *inter alia*, a contact section including a set of converging walls that define an insertion pathway for a complementary male terminal, the insertion pathway having a diameter that is smaller than a closed tubular portion that is proximate the set of converging walls; and a flexible contact element partially disposed within the contact section, wherein the flexible contact element does not extend into the set of converging walls.

Applicant therefore respectfully submits that claims 48, 52, and 54 are patentably distinct from Shima, for substantially the same reasons discussed above in relation to claim 45. Withdrawal of the rejection of claims 48, 52, and 54 (and claims 50, 51, and 53, which depend from claims 48 or 52) under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) is respectfully requested.

A notice of allowability is respectfully requested.

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